

Message Text

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ACTION EA-09

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FM AMCONSUL SYDNEY

TO AMEMBASSY CANBERRA

INFO SECSTATE WASHDC 6571

AMCONSUL MELBOURNE

AMCONSUL BRISBANE UNN

AMCONSUL PERTH UNN

C O N F I D E N T I A L SYDNEY 2354

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: AS, PINT

SUBJECT: AUSTRALIAN POLITICAL CRISIS

REF: CANBERRA 7613

1. SUMMARY: RECENTLY APPOINTED MINISTER NORTHERN TERRITORIES (IN WHITLAM GOVT) PAUL KEATING, AN ALP MEMBER PARLIAMENT FROM SYDNEY, CONFIRMED IN MOST BITTER TERMS EMBASSY CANBERRA'S JUDGMENT IN PARA ONE REFTEL THAT NATURE OF PARLIAMENTARY DEMOCRACY BEING ALTERED AND THE FUTURE IS ONE OF INSTABILITY. HE MADE SEVERAL POINTS:

2. GOVERNOR GENERAL KERR'S ACTION IS PROOF OF "ESTABLISHMENT'S DETERMINATION TO GET RID OF LABOR GOVERNMENT AT ANY COST". IT WILL DEEPEN HOSTILITY TO ESTABLISHMENT, "STRENGTHEN THE REDS AND PUT MODERATES AT MERCY OF EXTREMISTS". KEATING CHARGED GOVERNOR GENERAL CONSPIRED SECRETLY WITH FRASER. HAD KERR FRANKLY GIVEN WHITLAM A CHOICE BETWEEN RESIGNATION OR CALLING DOUBLE DISSOLUTION (IN ORDER TO BREAK DEADLOCK) WHITLAM WOULD HAVE CALLED ELECTION AND WON IT FROM THE ADVANTAGEOUS POSITION OF BEING IN POWER. IN FACT, KERR DID
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NOT OFFER THIS CLEAR-CUT CHOICE BUT REACHED HIS OWN CON-

CLUSION (WHICH FRASER KNEW IN ADVANCE) AND EXECUTED IT ON THE SPOT BY WITHDRAWING WHITLAM'S COMMISSION.

3. AS RESULT KERR GAVE FRASER THE IMMENSE ADVANTAGE OF WAGING CAMPAIGN FROM POSITION OF POWER. RESULTS ALREADY EVIDENT SAYS KEATING. FRASER PUBLICLY INDICATED INTENTION TO USE ABC WHILE OWNERS OF PRO-FRASER PRESS ARE GIVING HIM UNFAIR ADVANTAGE BY HAVING MANAGEMENT INTERFERE IN THE NEWS COVERAGE AND MAKE-UP REPORTAGE. HE MENTIONED PAGE ONE OF TODAY'S AUSTRALIAN AND PAGE TWO OF YESTERDAY'S MIRROR AS EXAMPLES. SOME ELEMENTS IN ALP CONSIDERING WHETHER TO STRIKE BACK, "CLOSING DOWN THE PRESS BY CALLING OUT THE PRINTERS AND DELIVERY UNIONS ON STRIKE". THESE ELEMENTS WOULD IGNORE ACTU PRESIDENT HAWKE'S ADMONITION AGAINST INDUSTRIAL ACTION. HOWEVER, KEATING ADDED DECISION NOT YET MADE AND WILL DEPEND ON JUDGMENT WHETHER STRIKE WOULD BENEFIT PARTY OR BE COUNTER-PRODUCTIVE.

4. KEATING ACKNOWLEDGED CRISIS REVEALS DEEP SCHIZOID TENDENCY IN AUSTRALIAN CONSTITUTION WHICH INCORPORATES INCOMPATIBLE CHUNKS OF BRITISH WESTMINSTER AND AMERICAN FEDERAL SYSTEMS. CANNOT BE CORRECTED BY AMENDMENT IN FORESEEABLE FUTURE BECAUSE OF OPPOSITION FROM STATES, L/CP AND CONSERVATIVE POPULACE IN COUNTRYSIDE. KNOWING THIS, AND CONVINCED THE "ESTABLISHMENT" WOULD FORCE LABOR GOVERNMENT OUT ASAP BY ANY AVAILABLE MEANS, WHITLAM DECIDED AT OUTSET HIS ADMINISTRATION IN DECEMBER 1972 TO RAM THROUGH AS MUCH NEW SOCIAL REFORM AS POSSIBLE, SAYING, "THEY'LL GET US OUT. LET'S DO WHAT WE CAN WHILE WE ARE HERE". AS KEATING SEES IT PRIMIN'S PROPHECY HAS COME TRUE AND IF ALP LOSES THIS ELECTION "CAN THE LABOR PARTY WHICH HAS HELD THE REDS AT BAY ALL THESE YEARS, DO SO ANY LONGER?"

5. COMMENT: WHILE KEATING (A MODERATE) IS PARTLY ANIMATED BY IMMEDIATE SENSE OF RAGE, HIS REMARKS ARE CONSISTENT WITH HIS LINE TWO MONTHS AGO AT A MUCH CALMER TIME. INDEED EVEN THEN HE FORESAW POSSIBLE STRIKES TO CLOSE DOWN THE PRESS AND EVEN USE OF POLICE AND ARMY IF STRIKE BREAKERS WERE BROUGHT IN (SEE MEMCON SEPTEMBER 16).

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